

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 27 June 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Alex Farquharson (Vice-Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Forhad Chowdhury, Mason Humberstone, Wendy Kerby, Conor McGrath, Ellie Plater and Carolina Veres.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 6.39pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair welcomed new Members to their first meeting of the Select Committee.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor John Duncan.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference for the Community Select Committee, as approved at the Annual Council meeting held on 24 May 2023, were noted.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS - 9 MARCH & 29 MARCH 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Community Select Committee held on 9 March 2023 and 29 March 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

4 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023-24

The Select Committee considered its proposed Work Programme for 2023/24.

The Chair introduced the report and stressed to Members that the work of the Committee had to be evidence-based, and that Members had a duty to research and probe the issues that they scrutinised in order that they were able to come to meetings informed, ready to elicit relevant information from witnesses and officers. In respect of the proposed Work Programme, she commented as follows:

Repairs review – some evidence gathering would be required by Members and officers to ascertain the state of the Council's Repairs service. This could also include benchmarking information with Repairs services operated by other local

authorities. The Scrutiny Officer invited Members to provide him with details of the type of casework enquiries they were receiving from residents regarding repairs. Another possibility would be Member site visits with the SBC Repairs Team. He commented that a new Assistant Director responsible for Housing Repairs was to take up post in early July 2023, and that he would invite her to attend the Select Committee's next meeting on 26 July 2023.

Crime and Disorder – the Select Committee had a statutory role to conduct one meeting a year to consider crime and disorder. This meeting was ably supported by the Council's Community Safety Team and the Police. Nearer the time of the meeting, Members would be requested to provide issues they wished to raise in advance, in order that the Police and officers were made aware of those issues so that the meeting could be focussed on those items.

Public Health – similarly, the Select Committee had previously agreed to have a standing item a statutory role to conduct one meeting a year to consider public health. The County Director of Public Health (Prof. Jim McManus) was an excellent and knowledgeable speaker and it was always an interesting and informative meeting. As well as covering public health issues that were of local concern for Stevenage the intention was that Members would receive an update on the new Integrated Care Boards, which had replaced the former NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Cultural Strategy – this would be an update review, carried out via a one-off meeting, currently programmed for 19 September 2023. This would build on the excellent work that the Committee had undertaken to pre-scrutinise a New Towns Heritage Centre at the new Civic Hub building.

Pre-scrutiny items – these would now be led by Scrutiny Members, rather than the previous regime of Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups (PHAGs) led by the relevant Executive Member. For 2023/24, pre-scrutiny items would include Community Centres, Housing Allocations Policy, Housing Management Governance arrangements and the Fairlands Valley Park Activity Centre. The Chair asked if consideration of the latter item could be carried out as soon as possible, and the Scrutiny Officer agreed to ascertain a timescale from the Operations Director.

The Chair advised that the Work Programme was very much a working document. If any Members wished to ask questions about the Work Programme outside of the meeting, she invited them to contact her or the Scrutiny Officer either by phone or e-mail.

In response to a Member's question about damp and mould complaints raised by Council tenants/leaseholders to councillors, the Chair outlined the process for the logging such complaints. She commented that there was more than one cause of damp/mould in Council premises, and each case had to be investigated before any remedial action was authorised. Every case of damp and mould had to be considered as a separate case as each may have a different cause. However, the Council's response to initial reports was now much faster, although the solution may take some time due to various factors, including the tenant posing obstacles to progress.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Select Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out in the agenda, be noted.

5 EXECUTIVE MEMBER RESPONSE TO THE HOUSING VOIDS REVIEW & FINAL REPORT

The Select Committee considered the Executive Member's response to the Housing Voids Review final report.

The Housing Operations Manager (Providing Homes) commented that the recommendations in the final report had been supported by the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development and would be implemented by officers going forward. The proposed tenancy audits would be a positive addition to the ongoing work aimed at improving the turnaround times for bringing void properties back into use.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development's response to the Select Committee's recommendations set out in its final report on the Voids Review be noted.

6 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

7 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR